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COUNTRY Poland

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SUBJECT Living Conditions of Factory Workers

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1. Factory workers in Poland -- both skilled and unskilled -- work 46 hours a week; eight hours a day, from Monday through Friday, and six hours on Saturday. The first shift usually begins at 6:00 a.m., but this varies according to the factory.
2. Although all places of employment are state-controlled, there is no uniform pay scale. In general, the scales are divided into two groups, one designed for the investment workers and the second designed for the exploitation workers. Investments include the construction of new buildings or the expansion of old buildings, either for employment or residence. Work in any establishment which is not concerned with the building or expanding of an area or building is called exploitation. The base pay is about the same in the two sets of scales. But the bonus, or premium, is larger for investment workers. This bonus is issued for the fulfilling or the exceeding of one's monthly norm of production. I do not know the scale of norms on which the bonuses were computed. Higher bracket salaries were limited to about 6,000 zlotys per month which included the monthly bonus. Salaries of such figures were drawn by directors. The lowest wage for factory workers was about 300 zlotys per month. The average wage earned by a skilled exploitation worker was 800 zlotys monthly, and that of a skilled investment worker about 1,000 zlotys monthly.
3. The Polish worker is by nature an industrious worker, but during the Communist occupation, he has worked industriously from fear of the Secret Police (UB). In addition he has tried to earn his monthly bonus which is necessary in order to live at subsistence level. The worker also realized that his employer, the state, is his landlord; and, therefore, not only his job but his place of residence must be protected by an attitude of cooperation, which might be false. The worker saw that, although in general there was a slow expansion in industry, there was still an unaccountable scarcity of consumers' goods. His standard of living did not rise; he worked without spirit.

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4. Relations among workers were poor. This stemmed chiefly from a mutual distrust because one could never be sure whether the next person was a UB informer. The relations between section foremen and workers were generally bad since, in most cases, the foremen were young men who were members of the Polish Youth Union (Zwiazek Mlodziezy Polski -- ZMP). The young foreman was not only responsible to the ZMP for the achievement of his norm, but he was also pressured by higher authorities to demand as much work as possible from the workers.
5. In order to increase the norm of production, teams of workers were often organized. The teams were supposed to compete with each other or with other factory teams in order to see which one could achieve the highest norm. Such competition was given wide publicity by the newspapers in which it was called "voluntary" joining for the sake of friendly competition. Team members did not join voluntarily, however. They joined because they felt compelled to for fear of being marked as a noncooperative member. Because of poor and limited technical means, it was impossible to exceed their usual production, but the factory authorities often recorded false results which were publicized as having been achieved by a certain team. The publicized results represented the new norm which the worker should strive to surpass.
6. With respect to safety precautions in factories, there was usually a department known as the Safety and Health Department (Bezpieczenstwo i Hygiena Pracy) which attempted to reduce the number of accidents. Such regulations as the following were in effect: whirling parts must be screened; loose sleeves must not be exposed; safety straps must be worn by those working on utility poles; and warning signs must be placed over power switches when work is being done on high-tension lines. (The signs, which were large, read "Do not turn the switch on".) The factory directors were responsible for safe working conditions. Despite the precautions taken and the instructions given to workers, there seemed to be a great number of accidents. I believe this stemmed from the fact that the workers were hurried and were under a nervous strain. In many cases, the safety instructions were not applicable to the out-dated equipment used.
7. About 10% of the price of medical treatment was borne by the factory worker. Because of the great shortage of modern medicines and the overcrowded conditions in hospitals, care of the sick was at a minimum. The doctor could only prescribe Polish-produced medicines and then about one-third of the amount needed by the patient. Physical exhaustion and nervous upsets were the most prevailing ailments. Though doctors knew the cure for these was rest and absence from work for a certain period of time a permit for absence could not be given unless a person had a fever.
8. I was not familiar with all the precautions taken by workers who were exposed to occupational diseases, but I have heard that people who worked with harmful acids, fumes or under other harmful conditions were given a free half liter of milk each day. The milk was supposed to act as an antidote.
9. Dentists usually visited the factory and workers had their teeth attended to there. There was no cost for dental service and steel crowns and cement fillings were furnished free. In general, the work was of an inferior quality.
10. Almost every factory had a restaurant where the workers could obtain an inexpensive meal. The meal was not very nourishing and meat was seldom served. Potatoes were served most frequently. About 20% of the workers ate in such restaurants; others brought their lunches or ate at home.

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11. Most factories had nurseries for the care of babies of working mothers. But I heard that the babies were not well cared for and that many mothers would not entrust their children to the nurseries.
12. About 10% of the workers were Party members and about 1% of these were sincere Communists. Approximately seven hours of each week were taken up by political meetings. The workers hated the Party because they knew it was responsible for low wages and the high cost of living. With the exception of sincere Communists those workers who joined the Party did so because they were forced to, or out of fear, knowing that their job and home depended on good Party relations.
13. Workers joined the trade union because they were forced to join. Although the trade union in theory helped the worker, all he could actually expect to receive from it was agitation, higher norms, and more meetings. The worker saw, on the part of the trade union, slight protection from the Party or promotion of his interests. His membership cost him one per cent of his monthly salary.
14. Another organization the worker was obliged to join was the Workers' Council (Rada Zakladowa). The function of this council was the protection of workers' rights and the hearing of grievances. In reality it was another tool of the Communist Party, the only aim of which seemed to be to force workers to higher norms of production.
15. Relations between the young workers and the old workers were usually strained. Through membership in the various youth organizations the young worker learned that the old worker belonged to the old system and that the new system depended on young men and women. This developed an impertinence on the part of the youth with an independence and a reluctance to work whole-heartedly. This resulted in the greater burden of work being placed on the older worker.
16. In almost every factory there was a recreation room where the worker could spend his free time and in which there was a library, Ping-pong tables, chess sets, newspapers, and a piano. However, the workers rarely, if ever, used this room because they were given no free time. (The rooms were used only for meetings.) There were also sport associations which organized competitive sports for the young workers.
17. The workers were entitled to 14 days vacation per year. They could get an inexpensive 14-day reservation at a state vacation resort but since the reservation was for the worker only and not for his family the greater percentage of married workers did not take advantage of this.
18. There were special schools which offered courses for the training of workers. Training was given sometimes during working hours and sometimes after working hours. Occasionally, workers attended courses outside the factories. The workers chosen for these courses were selected by the factory directors with the assistance of the Workers' Council. They made sure that the worker was in good standing with the Party. I heard that the courses were bogged down with Communist political lectures which infringed on the time spent in actual training. The political lectures, it appeared, were more important than the technical training. The increase in pay after a period of training was negligible.
19. On Communist holidays such as the 1st of May, the 22nd of July, or the 17th of October, the outstanding workers who had exceeded norms were given awards in the form of certificates, medals, or money. Most workers who were not sincere Party members viewed these awards with amusement.

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20. Living space was allocated to workers on a square meter basis. Ten square meters was allocated to a person who worked and was a bachelor, or to a student; five additional square meters was allocated for a dependent. As a rule, three persons were housed in one room. One room with kitchen was allocated to a couple and child, while two rooms with kitchen was for five to six people.
21. Apartments were given to workers only through their places of employment, from which the individual had to have a satisfactory recommendation from the Workers' Council and the Communist Party representative. Rents for old apartments were as follows: one room with kitchen about 50 zlotys monthly; two rooms with kitchen about 70 zlotys. New or renovated apartments cost about 100% more. When changing his place of employment, a person was often forced to change his place of residence.
22. Generally, a worker owned two suits of clothing -- one for work days and one for the holidays. The suits were 30% wool. In the factory the workers wore cotton suits furnished by the factory and laundered every two weeks at the expense of the factory. In addition, a male worker's wardrobe consisted of a winter overcoat, two pairs of shoes, three or four shirts, and about three or four sets of underclothes.
23. Furniture for one room cost from 3,000 to 6,000 zlotys. Individual items cost approximately as follows: a studio couch, 2,200 zlotys; a wooden chair, 140 zlotys; a small wardrobe, 800 zlotys; a large wardrobe, 1,500 zlotys. The purchase of new furniture by the workers was next to impossible with such prices. A worker's furniture was usually made up of a collection of odd pieces. One rarely found a matching set of furniture in a room.
24. The health of the average worker was generally poor. This was due to not having a balanced diet, a continuous state of nervousness, and the lack of warm winter clothing. In addition, a worker's apartment was damp and cold because he could not afford fuel. In case of sickness it was difficult to have a doctor call at the home because doctors were overworked and did not make house calls except in cases of extreme emergency.
25. Recreation for the worker was limited. Generally, he wanted to rest at home. He was not too interested in attending Communist propaganda movies. Many of the workers, when they could afford it, spent their free time drinking. I believe that drinking was rather heavy.
26. The earnings of a number of people were too small to cover the cost of living. Because of this, the worker was forced to help himself in other ways. He had a vegetable garden in the summer; he had the additional income of his wife or children. Often, a skilled worker would work privately, but illegally, to supplement his income. For example, a painter would paint interiors with state-owned paints. He did this privately and collected his fee. Many of these illegal craftsmen were employed because the work was usually done better and more quickly than with state labor. It cost about 800 zlotys to have three rooms, a kitchen, a bathroom, and hall painted by a private individual. The same job done by state labor cost about twice as much. Many electrical installations, plumbing installations, and even telephones could be installed illegally with better equipment than if done by the state. Many people buy, sell, or trade new and used miscellaneous articles in order to supplement their incomes.

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27. Immediately following World War II the following budget would be workable for the average skilled worker who earned between 800 to 1,000 zlotys per month:

<u>Expenditures</u>	<u>Amount (in zloty)</u>
Rent (one room and kitchen)	50
Food	320
Cleaning and washing facilities	50
Clothes	200
Heating	30
Recreation	50
Medicine	10
Transportation	30
Cigarettes	50
Newspapers, periodicals	10
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Now, however, food alone costs at least 20 zlotys per day for four persons or 600 zlotys per month. Therefore, it is usually necessary for the wife to accept a job to supplement the family income or for the worker to seek other means by which he can add to his income.

28. In comparing present conditions with conditions prior to World War II, one could buy for 100 prewar zlotys what today costs 3,000 zlotys. Even with the 3,000 zlotys one cannot buy the items one needs. At present many workers, particularly older people, remember the great difference in purchasing power. They also remember the days when political meetings did not take up so much of their time. The great number of meetings, it appears, is not devised to instill the workers with Communism but to leave them no time in which to think of the oppression of the Communist Party.

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